

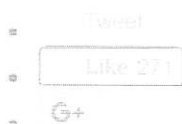
PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Trump's Religious Privilege Order a Cynical Pander to Evangelical Base

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The Center for Inquiry denounced President Trump's executive order easing the restrictions on politicking by tax exempt religious institutions, decrying the order as a cynical pander to the religious right. The order was signed on the National Day of Prayer, itself an unconstitutional endorsement of religious belief.

The executive order is intended to weaken the strictures of the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits tax exempt organizations, such as houses of worship and advocacy organizations like CFI, from using their privileges to endorse, oppose, or campaign for or against candidates for public office in their official capacities.

"This order is more troubling for what it represents than what it actually accomplishes," said Michael De Dora, director of government affairs for the Center for Inquiry. "Despite the president's claims today, religious leaders are already free to speak openly, and religious groups spend hundreds of millions of dollars per year lobbying, on all political issues. To maintain their institutions' tax exempt status, they are barred from partisan electioneering, a rule that is already woefully under-enforced."

"Instead of bone-throwing to the fringes of the religious right, President Trump should listen to the vast majority of the American people — including the majority of clergy — who oppose politicking from the pulpit and support the Johnson Amendment," said De Dora.

"While this executive order won't accomplish much in practical terms, it sends a signal that Trump is looking to reward his conservative evangelical base. But this political payback is divisive and dangerous, blurring the line between church leadership and political operatives."

The new order also purports to "provide regulatory relief" to those who hold religious objections, such as to the contraceptive coverage provisions of the Affordable Care Act, in line with the Hobby Lobby Supreme Court decision. Trump's willingness to sacrifice access to contraceptive care in employer-sponsored health insurance is another gift to his conservative evangelical base, at the expense of women's rights and health.

"America has largely avoided the religious conflict and strife that afflict other parts of the world by keeping religion and government separate," said De Dora. "President Trump doesn't seem to know or care about this founding principle."

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The Center for Inquiry (CFI) is a nonprofit educational, advocacy, and research organization headquartered in Amherst, New York, with executive offices in Washington, D.C. It is also home to the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science, the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, and the Council for Secular Humanism. The mission of CFI is to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values. Visit CFI on the web at www.centerforinquiry.net.